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SUBJECT: MELES Pressures CODEL MEEK on H.R. 2003

¶1. (SBU) Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles pressured Codel Meek to reverse his support for H.R. 2003 - The Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act - during a November 29 meeting. Meles went on to describe the bill as an attempt to micromanage Ethiopia's internal processes and said he felt personally bruised by the bill.

¶2. (SBU) In a meeting that also included Congress members Michael Arcuri, Tim Ryan, and Yvette D. Clarke, Meles said the bill is too serious to be ignored. He said the close cooperative relationship Ethiopia currently enjoys with the United States would be impossible if H.R. 2003 were to become law. The prime minister noted that the bill was "asking Ethiopia to do something even the United States does not do," which is to appoint representatives from all political parties represented in Parliament to a national election board. The bill, he said "suggests that unless we do what the United States says, we're not democratic." Meles said the election board process was agreed to by all parties, and for Congress to take a minority view on the matter transforms Ethiopia into a protectorate.

¶3. (SBU) In responding, Meek noted that the U.S. Administration has a different perspective on Ethiopia than is expressed by H.R. 2003, and that many members of Congress do not share or understand the Administration's position. Meek said that while members of Congress are not experts on foreign policy, they do represent the people of the United States, many of whom do not understand the aftermath of the May 2005 Ethiopian elections. Meek stressed that H.R. 2003 was not meant to embarrass Ethiopia. Congresswoman Clarke agreed, adding she was not proud that the Ethiopian Government (GoE) was insulted by H.R. 2003 and that she wanted to learn more about the issue.

¶4. (SBU) On Somalia, Meles praised the excellent cooperation the GoE enjoys with the Department of Defense in Somalia. He noted how well developed the two countries' information sharing has become, and noted his pleasure with the shared response to terrorism in Somalia. The prime minister said the GoE did not request financial support from the United States for its work in Somalia, but noted that the USG has given USD \$19 million to Uganda to help with peacekeeping. He also praised the excellent relationship the GoE enjoys with CENTCOM and said he didn't want to jeopardize that relationship when AFRICOM comes.

¶5. (SBU) On the situation in the Ogaden, Meles said "we haven't burnt villages in the Ogaden and DoD would know if we did. Why didn't the USG listen to its own military instead of listening to biased parties? There is no genocide, only counter-insurgency. Congress can criticize us, but first they should check the facts, and second, criticize, but don't dictate our behavior. We just want respect." Meek said the prime minister's ideas had great merit and promised to return to Congress and engage his colleagues on these issues. He expressed appreciation for the GoE's contributions on behalf of security in Africa and worldwide.

16. (U) Congressman Meek has not cleared this cable.

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